

Message Text

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ACTION EUR-12

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-05 H-01 INR-10
L-03 NSAE-00 PA-01 SP-02 SS-15 DOE-15 SOE-02
AID-05 COME-00 EB-08 FRB-03 TRSE-00 XMB-02
OPIC-03 LAB-04 SIL-01 OMB-01 ABF-01 STR-07 CEA-01
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FM AMEMBASSY LONDON
TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 7134
INFO ALL EC CAPITALS
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USEEC ALSO FOR EMBASSY

USOECDD

E.O. 11652: N/A
TAGS: PINT PGOV UK
SUBJ: GOVERNMENT MAKES CENSURE VOTE ISSUE OF CONFIDENCE

REF: LONDON 9269

SUMMARY: THE GOVERNMENT MOVED DECISIVELY JUNE 14 TO
CRYSTALLIZE THE ISSUE ON TONIGHT'S CENSURE VOTE (REFTEL)
BY MAKING IT AN ISSUE OF CONFIDENCE. THIS ACTION IS
EXPECTED TO FORCE THE LIBERALS, WHO HAD APPARENTLY
DECIDED TO ABSTAIN ON THE CENSURE VOTE, TO SUPPORT THE
GOVERNMENT. THE GOVERNMENT ALSO BELIEVES THIS ACTION
WILL CAUSE THE NATIONALIST PARTIES AND THE ULSTER
UNIONISTS TO RECONSIDER THEIR POSITIONS, SINCE A GENERAL
ELECTION AT THIS TIME WOULD KILL THE DEVOLUTION BILLS
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AND THE BILL TO INCREASE NORTHERN IRELAND'S PARLIAMENTAR
REPRESENTATION. BARRING THE UNEXPECTED, ACCORDINGLY,
THE GOVERNMENT SHOULD SURVIVE TONIGHT'S CONFIDENCE VOTE
BY A COMFORTABLE MARGIN. END SUMMARY.

1. THE GOVERNMENT THIS AFTERNOON ANNOUNCED THAT IT WILL
REGARD TONIGHT'S VOTE ON THE MOTION TO CENSURE CHANCEL-

LOR HEALEY A VOTE OF CONFIDENCE, MAKING IT A NEW BALL GAME. THIS DECISION WAS TAKEN AFTER SOUNDINGS OF THE MINOR PARTIES SHOWED THAT THE GOVERNMENT DID NOT HAVE ENOUGH ASSURED VOTES TO AVOID DEFEAT ON THE CENSURE MOTION, LARGELY BECAUSE THE LIBERALS HAD DECIDED TO ABSTAIN AND TWO LABOR MPS WILL BE ABSENT DUE TO ILLNESS. ALTHOUGH CONSERVATIVE PARTY SOURCES REPORTED THAT THEY DID NOT EXPECT TO WIN THE CENSURE VOTE, CALLAGHAN DECIDED THAT HE WAS UNWILLING TO RISK THE LOSS OF HEALEY AS CHANCELLOR AND CALLED FOR A SHOWDOWN. SINCE THE LIBERAL PACT WITH THE GOVERNMENT RUNS FOR THE BALANCE OF THIS PARLIAMENTARY SESSION, THEY ARE NOW EXPECTED TO SUPPORT THE GOVERNMENT.

2. THE NATIONALIST PARTIES AND THE ULSTER UNIONISTS ARE ALSO EXPECTED TO RECONSIDER THEIR POSITIONS IN THE LIGHT OF CALLAGHAN'S DECISION. IF THE GOVERNMENT SHOULD FALL AS A RESULT OF TONIGHT'S VOTE, THE SCOTTISH AND WELSH DEVOLUTION BILLS WOULD BE LOST FOR AT LEAST ANOTHER YEAR, AND THE SCOTTISH NATIONALISTS WOULD BE FORCED INTO AN ELECTION AT A TIME WHEN THEIR POLITICAL FORTUNES ARE AT A NADIR. SIMILARLY, THE INCREASED PARLIAMENTARY REPRESENTATION FOR NORTHERN IRELAND WOULD BE DELAYED, PERHAPS FOR AS LONG AS FIVE YEARS. THESE GROUPS, ACCORDINGLY, MAY WELL DECIDE THAT THIS IS NOT THE TIME FOR AN ELECTION.

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3. COMMENT: SEVERAL TORY SOURCES, INCLUDING MRS. THATCHER, HAD TOLD US THAT THEY DID NOT EXPECT TO WIN THE CENSURE VOTE, BUT AFTER SOUNDING OUT THE MINOR PARTIES AND COUNTING HEADS, THE LABOR WHIPS CONCLUDED THAT THEY DID NOT HAVE SUFFICIENT VOTES TO ENSURE VICTORY. FACED WITH THIS SITUATION, CALLAGHAN, IN THE WORDS OF ONE OF HIS CLOSE POLITICAL ASSOCIATES, DECIDED "TO SEE WHETHER THE MINOR PARTIES REALLY WANT AN ELECTION". HIS EXPECTATION, OF COURSE, IS THAT THEY DO NOT. WE AGREE. WE UNDERSTAND, HOWEVER, THAT THE LIBERALS WERE THROWN INTO CONFUSION FOLLOWING ANNOUNCEMENT OF CALLAGHAN'S DECISION AND, AT THE TIME THIS CABLE WAS BEING DRAFTED, HAD NOT DECIDED WHETHER TO HONOR THEIR COMMITMENT TO SUPPORT THE GOVERNMENT. SINCE WE HAVE DETECTED NO SIGNS OF PANIC AMONG GOVERNMENT WHIPS OR BACKBENCHERS AND OUR ASSESSMENT OF MINOR PARTY ATTITUDES TOWARD A GENERAL ELECTION COINCIDES WITH THAT OF THE GOVERNMENT, WE EXPECT CALLAGHAN WILL WIN TONIGHT'S VOTE BY A FAIRLY COMFORTABLE MARGIN -- SAY BY SOME 20 OR MORE VOTES.

BREWSTER

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